DEV ANAND: FOREVER YOUNG

He is the man who shocked Indian sensibilities with path-breaking films like *Guide* and *Hare Rama Hare Krishna*. He is the man who introduced on the silver screen, goddesses like Zeenat Aman, Tina Munim and Tabu. He was the one to give the industry an actor par excellence like Guru Dutt and a talented director like Shekhar Kapur. How, then, did the industry forget Dev Anand? How did they trivialise his contribution to Indian cinema? CINÉ BLITZ attempts to capture the thespian, in all his glory...

Amidst a collage of memories, sits the evergreen Dev Anand. Surrounded by books, posters of *Censor* (his latest film), withered flowers, a recently acquired (and well-deserved) Padmabhushan and lots of ideas. As usual, he is raring to go with *Censor* already complete and two more films, *Beauty Queen* and *Love At Times Square*, ready to be launched. He is as excited as a schoolboy about his latest project. He tells us that if he didn't have something to work on all the time, he wouldn't be able to survive.

Right this minute, *Censor* is taking up all his attention. Slated for release by mid-March, Dev Anand is rushing against time to complete the mixing and dubbing. "*Censor* is going to be the turning point of my career," he announces dramatically, as we settle down for a chat, effectively shocking us into silence. "This film is my most mature work as a director. I have made *Censor* with a tremendous amount of intelligence. It will be the turning point of motion picture making," he says almost gleefully.

Star Maker...With Geeta Bali in *Baazi*, the film which launched the talented Guru Dutt

It's a joy to watch Dev Anand as he sits through his post-production. He is still by far the most enthusiastic of his whole team. It is no wonder that while all his contemporaries have faded away, he is still going strong. "I have survived because I have grown with each one of my movies. Each one has been a learning experience. I have not allowed myself to get stagnant, no matter what happened. I'll give you a small example. Earlier this year, I had gone to New York to receive an award from Hilary Clinton. That night as I was returning back to my hotel, I passed Times Square. If you ask me to define joy, I would say it was that moment... Watching the milling faces, smiling, laughing, the neon lights so huge that they make Times Square as bright as day! Ten days later, I went back to San Francisco to receive the award for Star Of The Millennium and I made it a point to spend two days at Times Square. Something had happened to me at the place, 30 years ago, when I was in the States printing *Guide*. And when I re-visited Times Square, I knew that I would be making that memory into a film. I came back and announced *Love At Times Square*. I have already finalised the cast for the film."

It has been said that for Dev saab, nothing exists beyond films. He himself describes it as his intoxicant, his be all and end all. "Tell me, would a relationship give you as much pleasure as your work? All forms of art are rolled in to one medium called filmmaking. Yes, I admit that for me my work is my passion. Filmmaking is a medium through which you can communicate with lakhs and lakhs of people. Imagine, the number of people you are reaching out to! Imagine how many people are seeing your work and passing their judgements! It's fantastic, don't you think? I tell you, when I am involved with my film, I am not aware of what's happening around me. Then I don't care what people are saying about me or what they are criticisng me for. No one out there knows what the real me is all about. What matters most to me is my films. Yes, I do call my work my intoxicant. What's wrong with that? My excitement, my pleasure, my ecstasy is films. There is so much that I have to say to the world and there is no time at all."

Do human relationships matter to him at all? "Of course, they do!" he insists. "I have my wife at home, my son and my daughter. These people are important to me. These relationships are important to me. But you have to realise that human relationships are like shifting sands; they are changing by the minute. Nothing is constant. Nothing is predictable. Ultimately, every relationship changes."

He obviously doesn't allow himself to get attached to people...

"I think attachment is a word that is very worldly. I am beyond all that now. The only thing I allow myself to get attached to is my work," he reveals, almost bluntly.

Women were crazy about him at one point of time....

Laughing, he exclaims, "They are still crazy about me, believe me! And I am not being pompous when I say this. Young girls come up to me and say, Mr. Anand, my mom was crazy about you!' But looking into that young girl's eyes, I can see that she likes me too. I don't know, maybe I emit this excitement, that's why people flock to me. Everybody wants to live with excitement, don't they? There is something about me that fascinates women. To date, I haven't been able to figure out what that something is," he says ruefully.

His contemporaries have steadfastly maintained, and almost enviously at that, that Dev was by far the luckiest of them all. He didn't have to struggle at all. That he got his big breaks right away...

Smiling he says, "Well, I can't deny that. You are talking to a man who joined the industry in 1945 and his first film was as a lead. It's been 56 years and I am still playing lead roles. In 1949, I started Navketan with my brothers, barely four years after I started working. Navketan's first film was *Officer* and then came *Baazi*, where we introduced Guru Dutt, one of this nation's finest actors. Can you imagine that Navketan has been around for 51 years? People have died and gone but Dev Anand is still making films and is still excited as a school boy, doing it!"

Shocking Indian Sensibilities... With Padmini Kolhapure in *Swami Dada*

And now, he has a Padmabhushan as proof of his tremendous contribution to Indian cinema... Surprisingly, the star brushes off the award saying, "This Padmabhushan has come 25 years too late! It doesn't excite me at all. Like I keep saying, my focus, my excitement, continues to be my work. I want to leave something behind by which I will be remembered. How many directors, stars, music directors, lyricists has Navketan given to this industry? Isn't that a far greater contribution rather than building flats and lending money to people? I do hope that people realise this!"

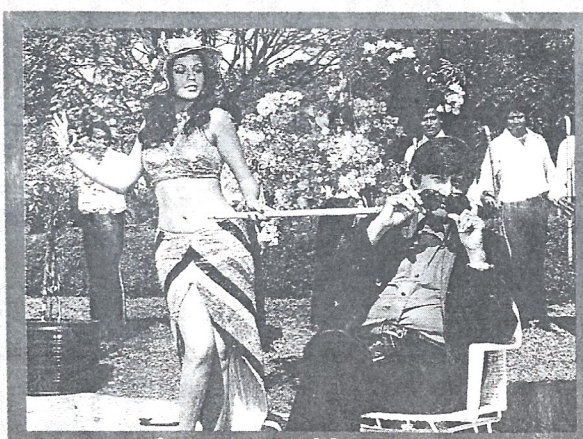
Guide, *Hare Rama Hare Krishna*, *Des Pardes* were some of Dev Anand's landmark films. What memories does he have of directing these films? "Well, let me tell you that my films have almost always created some kind of controversy. *Guide* was by far the most controversial of all my films. I was told that the film would be banned because it dealt with the subject of adultery. Do you know the kind of trouble I had selling it? We were adapting a novel that was basically written for Western sensibilities. Then the

subject was a big problem. The industry was sure that my film would be the biggest fiasco. Then, my image became a problem too. People said that I had too strong a romantic image and that audiences would be very disappointed with the end when I turn a saint. But I fought with the distributors, compromised on my prices and made sure that the film sold. And when the film released, it became a huge hit. But distributors are senseless people. They belong to a breed that is more interested in money, not in the creative aspect of the film! That's why no moneybag is ever remembered. Whereas people felicitate creative people, remember them forever. Today when people see *Guide*, they call it a cult film, but at that time I had to fight with a lot of people to get the film released. We even made an English version of *Guide*, which was co-produced by Pearl S. Buck. Unfortunately, the film didn't do well abroad!"

Guide was accepted unconditionally by the masses wasn't it? "It was accepted because it appealed to the emotions of the Indian audience. After all, the film was all about sacrifice, which is the core of Indian philosophy. It is ingrained in the Indian psyche. I remember, when I got back from the premiere of *Guide* in Maratha Mandir, I was inundated with calls from people, all wanting to sympathise with me for making a film that was going to be an all time great flop! They felt that I had blundered badly by making this film," he chuckles.

He'd almost rebelled against the industry when he was making *Hare Rama, Hare Krishna*... Nodding that famous nod, Dev Anand reminisces: "It was very amusing but at the time when I was making the film, my romantic image was so strong that no heroine wanted to play my sister. Mumtaz was adamant that she would play my romantic lead and not my sister. Adding to all this was the fact that she was doing a whole lot of films when I signed her. According to a new regulation that had been passed by the Cine Artistes Association, no actor could do more than four films in a year. Everyone was up in arms against me because I was flouting the rules. But I fought with them all saying that I had sunk a lot of money into *Hare Rama*... and I couldn't afford to let Mumtaz go. Finally my conviction in the film saw me through and I was allowed to shoot with Mumtaz!"

Apparently, there were a lot of hiccups with the film? "People were zapped when I announced the film because they thought that I was making a 'dharmic' film. But during the 70s, the Hippie movement was at its peak and drugs had become a big issue. I was in Nepal when the idea for *Hare Rama*... hit me. I saw these backpackers, a bunch of dirtily dressed people, tripping on drugs and it hit me that this would be the subject for my film! All through the making of the film, I heard people making snide comments but once the film released, they all had to eat humble pie because everyone realised that I was addressing an explosive issue! The film became a rage! I still cherish this film. Look, you can make love stories all the time. But honestly, there are other issues, which are far more exciting. With love, you are safe, but if you play safe all the time, you will be dull and I certainly never wanted to be a dull person. Sometimes, one needs to jump right into the fray to experience a thrill and feel high. That's what life is all about," he says expansively.



Creator Of Screen Goddesses... With his discovery Zeenat Aman in *Darling Darling*!

Intoxicated By Work... Dev is as excited as a school boy about his new film *Censor*

Dev Anand has certainly believed in taking chances with life, making films like *Taxi Driver*, *Guide*, *Des Pardes*. Yet he also made a bunch of pointless films in the 90s. Why was that? The consummate debater, Dev saab argues, "I will never agree that my films were pointless. All the films that I have made, I have made with a lot of thought. So what if a majority didn't like the film? It doesn't mean that my film flopped!"

Dev Anand has always been known to be a very positive person. How does he deal with the lows in life? "My lows are very short lived temperamentally. There is no time to think and carry any emotional luggage. I don't have any time for my yesterdays. Only when I write my autobiography will I visit my past. Will it be a painful experience? I don't think so. No experience can be painful, if you deal with it in the right way. I'll give you a beautiful example. When a child is born, it is born with a lot of pain, but childbirth is still the ultimate experience for a woman, isn't it? You have to experience some amount of pain to reach that moment of ecstasy. That's how I deal with my lows, knowing that something better is always ahead of me. You see me, so excited about my film *Censor*. But to tell you the truth, my involvement with it is already over. Now, whatever people may say about the film, about me, I will not be there to listen to them. I have reached a stage in my life, which can best be described with a dialogue from *Guide*. "Na dukh hai, na sukh hai, na deen, na duniya, na insaan, na bhagwan, sirf main, main, main..."

We leave Navketan with the distinct impression of a lonely man who finds his only solace in work.

Mini-Keith